

VZCZCXRO2225
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBY #1016 3230557
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 190557Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2250
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE 6782
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 5048
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 5050
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUHEMAB/PACOM CCP

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 001016

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2019
TAGS: PGOV PREL AF AS
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN MESSAGES TO KARZAI WILL MIRROR THOSE OF
U.S.

REF: STATE 118297

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Edgard D. Kagan for reasons 1.4(b)(d)

¶11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Australia agrees with the U.S. approach to engaging Afghanistan. Australia is already in the process of finalizing its own message, which is very similar to that laid out in the referenced cable. Pushing for merit-based appointments is a particular concern. Australian officials were grateful to be informed of U.S. position and would welcome any future coordination with the U.S. on Afghan policy. END SUMMARY.

Focus is the Key

¶12. (C/NF) Australia supports the U.S. position on engaging the Karzai government in the wake of recent elections. Afghanistan Section Director Paul Noonan of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) had learned through the Australian Embassy in Washington that a demarche on the American position was on the way and his office was eagerly awaiting it. Noonan was enthusiastic about the focused approach of U.S. policy. He agreed that targeting five or six important messages, rather than giving Afghanistan a laundry list of problems, was the best way to pressure the Afghan government to make meaningful changes.

Support for U.S. Message, Finalizing Their Own

¶13. (C/NF) According to Noonan, Australia is currently in the process of finalizing its own main messages to the Afghan government, but officials are eager to coordinate with the United States. Australia's talking points, which Noonan said are very similar to the U.S. ones, have been drafted and are currently awaiting approval at the ministerial level. The one significant difference was that Australian points do not include a call for Afghanistan to begin taking responsibility for security on a district-by-district basis. Noonan acknowledged that the policy made sense, but said that this proposal had not yet been discussed enough within the government for a position to emerge.

¶14. (C/NF) Australia supports clear benchmarks set for the progress of the Karzai government on certain issues. Noonan believes that some of these should include merit-based appointments, narcotics, and women's rights. While these issues are complicated and will not be solved soon, Australia believes that Karzai should at least be making an effort to address them if he is to continue to have international support.

Worries Over Oruzgan Governor Appointment

¶6. (C/NF) The issue of appointments is especially important to Australia. Noonan worries that Karzai may choose to replace the governor of Oruzgan province, where most of the Australian forces deployed in Afghanistan are serving. While the current governor is "not brilliant," the Australian government believes that he is about the best that could be hoped for. The major worry for Australia is that Karzai would appoint someone with a more checkered history. This could have a negative impact on Australian public support for the war. Afghanistan faces a key moment when Karzai begins to announce his appointments, and Noonan believes it is important that he send a positive message with those choices. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered this message to Karzai during a recent phone conversation.

¶5. (C/NF) COMMENT: Australia is eager to work with the United States to formulate their message to the Afghan government. Australian officials place great importance on communication with the United States and being "in the loop" when it comes to U.S. policy. Australia shares our concerns about the Karzai government and will support U.S. efforts to address them. END COMMENT.

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